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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women

**Statement submitted by the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies,
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the
Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

Women and the family

The role of women in the family and the role of family in the lives of women should be given central consideration by the Committee in its deliberations on the Beijing Platform for Action. Governments should abide by the language of the Platform, which states that "the family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened" (para. 29).

As economic systems around the world have evolved, many women have chosen to seek employment outside the home. But even with increased opportunities to do so, many women have chosen not to enter the workforce but instead to focus their energies on their families. Such women, who have chosen to pursue the role of mother, deserve recognition and protection.

Women who choose not to join the economic workforce make a vast contribution to the family, particularly as mothers, which is at least as important

as any economic contribution they might make. It is detrimental to the health of society to promote the view that an individual's only worth is economic.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognizes that women do not need to enter the workforce to have value in the community.

Paragraph 21 of the Platform for Action states that, "Women are key contributors to the economy and to combating poverty through both remunerated and unremunerated work at home ...". Paragraph 29 reinforces that view by stating that, "Women make a great contribution to the welfare of the family and to the development of society, which is still not recognized or considered in its full importance".

Most women do not view motherhood as an odious stereotype. Indeed, a huge number of women aspire to that role as the most fulfilling of their lives. Most of the world's work is less satisfying and less diverse than motherhood, and women who choose to pursue it should be encouraged and supported by society.

Sadly, there are some women who encounter violence in their homes. While domestic violence is disgraceful, most marriages are not abusive. Women and men are generally safer, healthier and more prosperous in marriage than outside it.

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A vast majority of families are not abusive, and these realities should be reflected in policies that generally strengthen the integrity of the family and the home. Policy makers must be careful not to allow the problems that exist in some families to direct policy that will undermine strong families.

In November 1999, Wirthlin Worldwide released the results of its worldwide survey on the family. The results revealed that 78 per cent of people around the world agree that the family is the fundamental unit of society.

We encourage all Governments and intergovernmental organizations to recognize, protect and promote the family as the fundamental unit of society. We also urge Governments to give due attention to women's irreplaceable role within the family and to protect them in the uniquely feminine capacity of motherhood.